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ABSTRACT

Elementary social studies was "custom made" to fit progressive era issues and theories, and to "develop" children into good citizens. Social studies has not developed fast enough to keep pace with culture changes since World War II. Assumptions changed in the United States during World War II and elementary social studies curriculum failed to adapt to the new demands and theories. This explains why social studies is a vanishing species of curriculum. Social studies is unable to compete with language arts for space in the "basic" curriculum. This paper reviews the context and explains the developmental theory that supported the social studies in the progressive era. An explanation of John Dewey's concerns and the serious flaws in elementary social studies is given. A case study of why and how a group of parents successfully supported social studies in Texas in 1980 proves these parent views align perfectly with humanist philosophy, clear political demands, and with modern cognitive psychology that replaced genetic stage theory. The paper suggests that social studies can realign with key forces in today's social and theoretical context to regain an important role in elementary curriculum. Contains 38 references. (BT)

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Rise, Stagnation and Decline of Elementary Social Studies and a Successful Defense

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Rise, Stagnation and Decline of Elementary Social Studies and a Successful Defense

Gary R. McKenzie

Elementary social studies was custom made to fit progressive era issues and theories and "develop" children into good citizens. Progressive education in general, hence elementary social studies, prospered and became traditions in schools until the onset of World War II, when both came under attack and began to decline. Elementary social studies has not adapted fast enough to keep pace with culture changes since the war, and is now a maladaped vanishing species of curriculum (Atwood, 1986), unable to compete with language arts for space in "basic" curriculum.

The purposes of this paper are first, to review the context and explain the developmental theory that supported social studies in the progressive era, which will explain Dewey's concerns and reveals serious flaws in elementary social studies. Second, it will show those assumptions all changed in America during World War II, and show that elementary social studies failed to adapt to the new demands and theories, which will explain why social studies is a vanishing species of curriculum. A third more optimistic purpose is to describe the modern context and report a case study of why and how a group of parents successfully supported social studies in Texas in 1980. These parent views align perfectly with humanist philosophy, clear political demands, and with the modern cognitive psychology that replaced genetic stage theory. The total argument suggests social studies can

realign with key forces in today's social and theoretical context to regain an important role in elementary curriculum.

Origins of the Social Studies Theses

Three or four factors worked together to replace Jefferson's enlightenment humanist philosophy of education with progressive education and social studies. All were sincere and undoubtedly well intended, but none of the original factors are popular or persuasive now, and understanding what they were will help to understand the decline.

First, turn of the century progressive intellectuals in structural sociology, social anthropology, Keynsian economics, and Marxist history, believed they could improve society by applying new social sciences through government (Cremin, 1961; Krug, 1972; Kliebard, 1987). This model implied a determinist curriculum of philosopher kings who Pinar et al. (1995) call master planners, not a free democracy of independent individuals.

Second, isolationist, low tech, practical Americans saw humanist history and geography as vestiges of European elitism, and college as a playground for idle rich males in an age when low tech common sense and trial and error invention were adequate to produce airplanes, cars and electrical industries. The great educational concern in the progressive era was to improve the condition and lives of the growing underclass of immigrants, who liberals saw as helpless victims of The Octopus or The Jungle and conservatives saw as a burden, source of poverty, crime, strikes and revolution. (Cremin. 1961; Kliebard, 1987).

Third, parents and teachers hoped to replace the stereotype of the harsh school master and the rote (and European) curriculum with more pleasant, attractive conditions and more useful learning.

The keystone of progressivism, as Kliebard (1987) suggests, was scientific bell curve sociology, child study and psychological theories of intelligence and development that stressed limits on children's abilities that appeared to justify the slogan, "fit the curriculum to the child". The dominant scientific "child centered" psychology of Darwin, Binet, Baldwin and Hall all attributed ability, interests and learning styles and ultimate achievement to genetics. Kliebard explains how G.S. Hall used child study and genetic psychology to discredit the humanist assumptions of the Committee of Ten in 1893, and become "undisputed leader" of developmental progressives. The theory of fixed genetic intelligence explains Dewey's objections to Hall's stages and child centered curriculum, and reveals Dewey as a humanist rather than a progressive (Kliebard, 1987).

Except for the bald behaviorism of Thorndyke and Watson, Hall's theory was the main theory available in "scientific" psychology. Genetic psychology claimed children develop naturally and evolve mentally as their race evolved, if and only if curriculum consists of developmental activities motivated by children's ancestral memories: first, manipulating objects in the "simian stage," and role play to learn practical skills and vocations in the "savage stage." The stage of rational thought

and "Christian morality" was restricted to cold climate upper class adolescent males who, Hall said, would evolve on to superhuman levels if they were not taught heuristic ideas that make thinking easy, and made to grapple with problems to exercise the brain longer in life (Hall, 1905). Hall applied his theory directly and dogmatically (1901) to curriculum to focus on training all young children in health, hygiene, middle class customs, norms of child rearing and vocations and attitudes, with a separate track for elite Anglo males, through developmentally appropriate activities. Hall's declaration that simian stage children needed to be shaped by activities, with rewards and punishments, and that "savage stage" students would conform to models in role play offered a non intellectual mechanism of eliciting changes in ethnic or normative beliefs and behavior under supervision of middle class teachers. Only upper class gifted males, who social Darwinists like Hall assumed were destined to become philosopher kings, were supposed to evolve the ability to think rationally (Hall, 1905).

Together, this zeitgeist justified molding children through education, as Socrates taught centuries earlier, in a centrally planned curriculum designed to train each child according to his ability to fit into a planned place in society. Indoctrination was important in mission of child centered, meliorist, or social efficiency social studies (Kliebard, 1987). In the 1920s legislators mandated progressive reforms in schools, curriculum, and required teachers to learn theories of human development--

which practically meant Hall's theory and thus carved inequality and determinism into the granite of law and policy that still exist and are applied today (State Board of Education, 1994).

Ironically, the same rationale also justified molding children to fit the utopian social reconstruction vision proposed by Counts in 1932. Like Hall, Counts never supposed young children would adopt his ideals rationally; he proposed to catch them before the stage of reason and engage them in role playing while they were still conformist. That leads us to World War II, and to new attitudes and beliefs about all four bases of progressivism.

World War II Changed American Culture and Theory

War propaganda, like the film series "Why We Fight," associated central planning and molding children and the uneducated with Fascism and Nazis; later McCarthy-era propaganda associated it with Communism. American war slogans, ideals and curriculum (Field, 1991) reemphasized Jefferson's humanist belief that each citizen was born with free will, reason, ability to learn great ideas in free schools, and the right to use those ideals to think freely and make wise choices. Behaviorist "shaping" or developmental "molding" of children into good citizens was unacceptable to the generation that fought World War II.

Second, the war ended isolationism, anti intellectualism, and low academic expectations. Popular attention was drawn to ideals in history and democratic government, racial tolerance and

equality, to places, resources and cultures in geography (Field, 1991), and to the math, languages and sciences needed to fight the war. Personnel demands and growing equality in the military discredited World War I practices of assigning duty by IQ or ethnicity. New opportunities for minority and lower class personnel raised aspirations.

Third, genetic developmental activities and behavior-reinforcement methods could not train troops or non traditional workers in dangerous or technical jobs with efficiency or accuracy. Learning theorists like Gagne' were enlisted to design training programs that would teach non-instinctive and often complex technical and decision making "principles" efficiently and effectively (Gredler, 1997). Cognitive theories that attribute ability to learned knowledge, as opposed to genetic IQ, stages or instincts, enabled more efficient, more egalitarian and more effective training. These theories produced instructional design.

In sum, American commitment to historic and constitutional freedoms, and our ability to apply science and technology were credited with winning the war. The GI Bills and Rosie Riveters, who skipped college before the war, received training during and after the war, which raised their academic expectations. They resolved that their children would learn college prep subjects and go to college. Thus the mood and educational aspirations of Americans, especially the parents, PTAs, school trustees, and policy makers of the 1950s and early 1960s were very different after World War II, not because of Sputnik, but because the

culture had changed in far more fundamental ways. Popular America had entered the information age.

Progressive Social Studies Stagnated

After Sputnik, cognitive learning theorists and academic scholars agreed at Woods Hole that all children could reason, learn powerful concepts and heuristic frameworks developed by experts, and use this knowledge of constructs to learn more and reason for themselves (Bruner, 1960). A few, like Michaelis, Morrisett, Rice and Taba switched theories, but many social studies theorists, school administrators and teachers who still believed prewar developmental stage theories and citizenship curriculum goals and methods doubted that young children could learn, understand and reason with ideas. The child centered concept of "cultural deprivation" modified belief in genetic disabilities enough to justify Headstart and social service programs, but supported low academic expectations for poor children already in school and raised in poverty. When Congress canceled support for curriculum projects and shifted funds to child centered Great Society programs, curriculum progressives chose to dismiss Hunt's scholarly analysis of Piagetian research, and interpret Piaget's cognitive stages as placing ceilings on what could be learned, as Hall and child centered theory originally proposed (McCartin, 1970; Atwood, 1986).

In 1969 Tucker reported a survey of members of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) that showed teachers and methods professors opposed and ignored the new theories and

curricula of the early 1960s, and stuck with the old child centered rationale and methods. The 1970 NCSS yearbook was based heabvily on developmental stage theory; it "applied" Piaget's theory to limit expectations and avoid teaching concepts (McCartin, 1970), as Hall and Kilpatrick had, not as Hunt did in 1961 or as Robbie Chase (1985) does now.

The 1970, NCSS curriculum guidelines (Manson et al., 1970) swung to neo-reconstruction "decision making" in which pupils K-12 were not supposed to learn information or become little social scientists, but were to grapple with and attempt to resolve specific social problems of conflict, racism and sexism, economic injustice and environmental imbalance. Neo-reconstruction incorporated new cognitive theories and honest intellectual models of inquiry,as suggested by values clarification Raths'(1967), Shaver's (1966) Jurisprudential approach or even Kohlberg's (1968) hope of raising moral reasoning with one plus modeling. However Pinar (1995) is probably correct in saying social studies curriculum specialists returned to the progressive crusade of molding children to correct specific social ills, as Counts and Rugg proposed in the 1930s. At any rate, the 1970 NCSS curriculum guidelines focused only on liberal concerns and the reconstruction bias, and crashed head on into the popular grass roots Back To Basics Movement.

NCSS issued the white paper (Roselle, 1975) exhorting teachers that the progressive guidelines would teach children to think critically and calling on them to convert parents to support

NCSS policy. Apparently, teachers sided with parents. Market analyses by publishers like Harcourt Brace found that elementary teachers wanted to return to chronological history and expanding horizons geography in the 1970s rather than lead their children into controversial issues. By 1979, college faculty of the National Council recognized that teachers were no longer interested in what theorists had to say (Tucker, 1979).

The initial reform documents of the 1980s (Commission on Excellence, 1983; Chaney, 1986; Hirsch, 1987; Ravitch and Finn, 1987) called for higher academic expectations with more emphasis on history, geography, and the humanities. But accepting the much needed and widespread popular and intellectual support for teaching subjects in the social studies clashed with the seventy year old progressive curriculum and social studies paradigm. Rather than compromise with academics and parents, hard line progressives opted to attack and discredit social scientists, psychologists and parents as conservative, Eurocentric, mental disciplinarians and purify curriculum discourse by excluding new ideas from the disciplines, psychology or parent demands (Pinar et al, 1995). In return, social studies was excluded from the collaborative commissions that led the school reforms in the 1980s.

The Battle of Texas HB 246

Elementary social studies replaced history and geography in 1917 because it was designed to appeal to a combination of philosophical assumptions, popular concerns, professional hopes,

and scientific claims, not because it was a pure theory protected by a closed discourse of a certified elite. It was well intended and perhaps helpful in a bygone era, but it became inbred by ignoring and excluding discourses that reflected cultural changes. By humanist philosophy, cultural standards and scientific theories that reemerged or grew out of World War II, the civil rights movement, and rising intellectual demands and expectations, the old approach to "developing good citizens" became a dinosaur, a historic mistake or, to some, a sterile Frankenstein's monster.

Social studies was targeted for elimination from the primary curriculum in Texas in 1980 (Curriculum Study Commission, 1980). The rationale for dropping social studies was based largely on practical and logical weaknesses and indefensible child centered progressive claims. A high school social studies teacher who sponsored HB 236 said his students learned nothing in elementary social studies. In senate committee hearings, an expert state witness testified that research shows young children cannot learn significant ideas in social studies until fourth grade. And without a committment to any clear content, social studies advocates had little to work with. In fact, an informed Senator used the traditional child centered rule that curriculum must fit individual children as evidence that experts in social studies have no essential goals for children, and used the progressive claim that young children learn better from direct experience and real life activities than from formal lessons. He concluded that, by our own theory, young children would be better off if social

studies was dropped and children were allowed to do almost anything else instead.(Senate Education Committee, 1981.)

A movement at the state PTA convention restored primary social studies to the official curriculum. But with no consensus between parents and reformers interested in raising curriculum expectations and social studies leaders to act on the opportunity, elementary social studies continued to decline. In Texas and other states that adopted high stakes accountability tests, the goal of eliminating primary social studies to make more time for reading and writing drills was supported by school administrators and at least some teachers who saw no other way to raise scores, and was accomplished by excluding social studies from reading, writing and arithmetic tests. Thus elementary schools all over the state (and nation) integrated language arts into social studies time, and elementary social studies disappeared into literacy scores. By 1986, elementary social studies, still clinging to its original and now inbred developmentalist social reform purity, was declared a vanishing species of curriculum (Atwood, 1986).

A Humanist Rationale

Elementary social studies must adapt to fit the new environment. If it is maladapted, it should become extinct. The sensible way to adapt is to fertilize and invigorate the subject with wigorous contemporary popular philosophy, parent demands, teacher needs and principles from radically changed and much improved science of cognitive psychology.

Humanist Philosophy

The genetic determinism and implicit racism, classism, sexism and elitism implicit in "child centered" master planner social studies is no longer philosophically acceptable or socially defensible. Enlightenment humanism, which led Jefferson to assume all people are born with free will, innate reason, the capacity to learn (not necessarily personally reinvent) great ideas from all times and cultures from study, and apply those ideas to govern themselves wisely, is a far more attractive philosophical base for social studies for citizens in a democracy. The author's political experience suggests any who publicly oppose that premise in the current social context can be discredited by showing the historic roots of the alternative in social Darwinism.

Political Zeitgeist

In the progressive era, it was considered kind, sensitive, humane and practical for paternalistic master planners to dumb down curriculum to fit the masses Hall called "the great army of incapables" and "adolescent races" (Kliebard, 1987). Today, policies and curriculum that propose to individualize are increasingly regarded as racist, classist, sexist, and discriminatory if not actually unconstitutional. The modern American concept of justice and equal rights explicitly requires equal opportunity and equal access to all forms of education. The only exceptions that are tolerated are policies like compensatory education that propose to close the learning gap, or affirmative action that allows individuals who have been denied equal

education the opportunity to prove they can do the work above the glass ceiling. Many advocates of voucher systems are minority leaders who recognize that low expectations, dumbed down curriculum and minimum literacy programs of the sort progressives supported, deny opportunity to learn heuristic ideas and prevent upward mobility. Again, in the author's political experience, increasing numbers of low income parents want their children to receive the kind of education in information, ideas and study strategies that will enable them to attend and succeed in college. In New York, 90 percent of high school seniors say they want to go to college; in Texas, 70 percent of seniors actually do start college. But colleges find many to be inadequately educated- too ignorant of events, concepts and models to comprehend texts and lectures.

Cognitive Theory

Modern mainstream theories of mental development, learning and cognition have all abandoned their century-old roots in genetic stages or behaviorist shaping. In developmental psychology, the fixed genetic stages of Darwin, Baldwin and Hall, and the rigid deductive application to limit curriculum that Dewey opposed,were disproved by Piaget's findings that a given child thinks on several different stages at any given age, depending on how much knowledge the child has learned from the environment (Hunt, 1961). Vygotsky's (1962) developmental theory corrected a serious logical and practical error in Piaget's speculations about equilibrium by proposing that all children learn cultural signs

and symbols (conventions, concepts and principles) from the outside in, because adult models state verbal rules children do not know (and are likely not to discover) within a "zone of proximal development," and children internalize these ideas by converting social speech into internal speech ... hence thought. This open mindedness to the possibly that children can learn ideas from teachers allowed learning research that Hall rejected to creep into developmental theory, which produced the consensus that stage theories seriously underestimate what young children can learn from organized instruction (Divesta, 1982). In 1994, the American Psychological Associations' history of developmental psychology (Parke et al., 1994) says developmental theorists show little interest in "strong" (limiting, prescriptive) forms of stage theory like Piaget's.

Learning theorists who study how people acquire new abilities that cannot be explained by development or maturation, dropped limiting stages and traditional behaviorist trial/error reinforcement models more than half a century ago in World War II. Bruner (1960), Ausubel (1963), Gagné (1965), and Rothkopf (1970) created the cognitive learning paradigm that says humans learn information and ideas of different kinds from the environment, including verbal instruction and texts, store those ideas in organized structures in long term memory, and use learned ideas to interpret later stimuli or lessons into meaningful form, and analyze and solve problems (Gagné, 1980, 1984). Cognitive schema theorists (Anderson et al., 1978) accordingly attribute

comprehension in reading and speech and new learning to the ability of the student to recognize and retrieve related information from long term memory.

By all modern mainstream cognitive learning theories, the old stage disabilities or cultural deprivation models that required discrimination in curriculum are now attributed largely to simple, correctable ignorance of conventional information, ideas, linguistic structures and learned learning strategies. In philosophy, that same set of beliefs is called humanism.

Teacher Goals

Movements to hold teachers accountable for pupil achievement, burgeoning micro management of curriculum, methods and paper work, an unrewarding focus on slow developing skill subjects and growing knowledge of effective teaching methods, is changing teacher priorities. While progressive era teachers wanted to lighten up the harsh school master image, modern teachers feel a need for a clear, respectable, non controversial subject with solid teachable content and methods that will allow them to achieve, demonstrate and enjoy success and thus improve the image of the profession. The author's preservice and inservice teachers are extremely uncomfortable negotiating the mine fields of teaching child centered topics originally designed to inculturate children to accept particular ideal family and community roles in a multural curriculum replete with controversial issues that are not supposed to produce indoctrination: Do they teach that one parent families are as

good as two parent families or that Heather should have two Mommies simply to raise self esteem when young children lack the knowledge or need to make such choices and neither the teachers nor most of the parents suppose it is the job of the school to dictate such attitudes? The trend toward a preference for solid content is reflected in renewed interest in curriculum by teachers, the current NCSS curriculum guidelines and the concept of Powerful Social Studies (Brophy and Alemaine, 1997) that do place more emphasis on teaching powerful history and geography content, and the support of the American Federation of Teachers for a national curriculum of essential elements. In fact, research on effective teachers (Brophy and Good, 1986), on effective schools (Good and Brophy, 1987), and research on motivation (Brophy, 1997) align far better with the model of active, clear, academic goal-oriented teaching than with the child centered model of individualizing activities and games with only developmental goals or controversial issues inherent in traditional social studies.

The author's experience as a school trustee, an instructional designer and a teacher educator suggests that teachers desperately need a time each day when they can teach some particular information and ideas children don't know, listen to, and learn well to feel successful and efficacious. More than any other subject, a humanist social studies of great stories, heroes, villains, tragedies and triumphs, welded together with ideas that order and explain the world, can be that subject.

How Would Heuristic Ideas Play in Austin?

The ultimate arbiters of what schools and curriculum will attract and support are the activist, upwardly mobile, education oriented parents who use school quality as a basic value in choosing where to live. If these parents avoid a district or neighborhood, or fail to move back into the area as the original residents age, the parent support, school programs, student achievement, school and neighborhood reputation, business and real estate values will decline, and the area will begin to rot into a slum and spread outward to a larger area that can include an entire city or even a state.

When the Texas curriculum study commission recommended eliminating primary social studies to make more time for language arts in November, 1980, four enabling bills were introduced in the legislature in December and gained the acquiescence of administrators and teacher lobbies. The Texas Council for Social Studies testified that social studies is basic because we develop good citizens and teach children to think, but for reasons explained previously, that claim proved ineffective.

Two other groups supported elementary social studies. One was a group of conservative education activists from west Texas who asserted children need social studies to learn about the history, government, laws, economy and geography of their communities, state and nation. The other supporters were a network of well educated moms of the Austin City Council of PTAs.

Austin moms (1980) voted to send officers to argue two points with legislators. First, they said poor children depend on the content of elementary social studies to learn stories, images, information and ideas about people, places, events, institutions and stories beyond their experience; they must know this information to visualize verbal descriptions, recognize metaphors and thus comprehend what they read. Also, they pointed out, if the curriculum is dumbed, parents of children who can read and write will shift their children and political support to vouchers and private schools.

The Austin arguments were especially plausible because, at the time, Austin was one of the last large urban school districts in the United States to be able to attract new middle class parents and high tech industries that follow them to a state with an otherwise undistinguished and unattractive reputation for education and a declining oil economy. That reputation for high standards in education, which attracted educated parents and the industries that follow them, has since made Austin the silicon valley of the central United States, with high ratings for quality of life for children and high ratings for school quality.

When the Austin PTA fielded this argument in district caucuses at the State PTA convention, superintendents argued that reading was basic while social studies had not clear purpose. The chief criticism from PTA leaders was that primary social studies is not history or geography but busywork activities, life adjustment games or self esteem therapies that aim to influence

children's attitudes and politics. Parents who believed social studies is "life adjustment" or "social reconstruction" believed a second reading period would be "a better use of school time."

Conclusion

Elementary social studies was created and specialized to develop good citizens according to turn of the century progressive philosophy, social demands, and genetic theories that were inconsistent with humanist philosophy, democratic government, modern intellectual demands and modern cognitive theories. It prospered because it fit the culture and theories well a hundred years ago, but once carved into law and tradition, it failed to adapt to sweeping cultural changes that resulted from World War II. It is no longer popular and is being squeezed out of the curriculum.

This paper suggests that a new subject can be created that aligns the enlightenment humanist philosophy of educating all people in heuristic ideas, on which Jefferson based the nation, with the current demand for higher educational standards and curriculum of more powerful ideas for all children to make them equal to the information processing tasks of the information age, and the post war cognitive theories that explain learning, development and thought in terms of learned information and ideas. The example of why PTA officers supported and opposed elementary social studies in Texas suggests that alignment behind a curriculum of explicitly heuristic ideas would be supported by teachers and parents.

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